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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7605th meeting
Friday, 15 January 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rosselli	(Uruguay)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Kang.

Ms. Kang: On behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, I have the honour to deliver the following briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

For more than four years, the humanitarian community, including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, sounded the alarm about the impact of Syria's conflict on ordinary men, women and children. We have written scores of reports, given numerous briefings and made countless statements describing the brutality, desperation and destitution facing Syria's people. We have requested, called for, insisted — even demanded — that the conflict be brought to an end, that civilians be protected from the relentless violence and that access be granted for life-saving humanitarian assistance. Our requests have mostly gone unanswered, and the people of Syria continue to live in a nightmarish reality dictated by a conflict that respects few rules and obeys no laws.

In recent days, harrowing images of malnutrition and hunger from the Syrian town of Madaya have shocked the world's conscience. Regrettably, the use of siege and starvation as a weapon of war has become routine and systematic in Syria, with devastating consequences for civilians. The barbarity of this tactic cannot be overstated. By besieging civilian towns and villages, the parties to the conflict have launched a vicious war on ordinary men, women and children, with callous indifference for their lives, health and well-being. A siege that denies people access to the basic necessities of life is unlawful, unacceptable and unconscionable. There can be no reason or rationale, no explanation or excuse, for preventing aid from reaching people in need. It is a grave violation of international law, and it must stop immediately.

The primary responsibility for this suffering lies with the party maintaining a siege. It is, however, shared by those that conduct military activities in or from populated areas, thereby using civilians as shields and placing them in harm's way. As the Secretary-General pointed out in his statement to the General Assembly yesterday, all sides, including the Syrian Government, which has the primary responsibility to protect the Syrian people, are committing atrocious acts prohibited under international humanitarian law.

Tragically, the situation in Madaya is not unique. Around 400,000 people in Syria are trapped in areas besieged by the various parties to the conflict. That includes towns and villages besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Government and allied forces, and non-State armed groups and the Al-Nusra Front. More broadly, the United Nations estimates that 4.5 million people reside in areas in Syria that are hard-to-reach, subject to various forms of restrictions on the movement of people and goods that severely limit their access to services and assistance. In addition to conflict and insecurity, that includes the deliberate obstruction of, or delays in, the delivery of aid, as well as the denial or removal of certain relief items, such as medical and surgical supplies, from aid convoys.

The United Nations and its partners, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and NGOs, have worked tirelessly for over four years to bring life-saving assistance to people to need across Syria. In 2015, that included, for example, food assistance for over 6 million people on average each month, safe drinking water for over 8 million people, non-food items for over 4.8 million people, and nutrition interventions for over 1.6 million people, many of them children. This week, on 11 and 14 January, inter-agency convoys made up of 130 trucks reached the town of Madaya and the nearby Bqine, as well as Fu'ah and Kafraya, with urgent assistance for over 60,000 people, including food and nutritional support, medicines and medical equipment, and non-food items. Separately, the third part of a series of convoys brought assistance to over 37,000 people

in Al-Waer, Homs governorate. Further assistance is scheduled to reach the areas later this week. Those and other aid deliveries have saved thousands of lives, often at great cost. More than 80 humanitarian workers have been killed since the conflict began. Many others remain missing.

In some cases, simply bringing assistance to people in need is not enough. In Madaya, the siege has resulted in conditions so severe that people have lost their lives, and many others currently suffer severe acute malnutrition, which, if left untreated, may result in death. Teams on the ground are working on multiple tracks to provide urgent treatment on site, conduct screening to identify critical cases and, where required, negotiate for the timely medical evacuation of patients. At present, almost 390 patients have been screened, 9 have been evacuated together with their family members and at least 19 others are in need of urgent evacuation. The United Nations has requested approval for their immediate and unconditional transfer to a safe place for treatment and for sustained access to the area for medical and humanitarian partners.

While those developments are positive, they are but a trickle. In 2015, the United Nations was able to reach less than 3 per cent of the population of besieged areas on average, with assistance in any given sector; in 2014, the figure was less than 5 per cent. Throughout the year, 80 requests for inter-agency cross-line convoys to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, out of a total of 113, went unanswered. This week, the United Nations submitted requests for further inter-agency convoys to bring life-saving assistance to besieged and hard-to-reach communities across the country. Those requests and other outstanding requests must be approved as a matter of urgency and without further delay. Similarly, the slow and bureaucratic procedures that have been imposed on humanitarian operations in Syria must be simplified and streamlined. Food, water and medicine are not bargaining chips or favours that the parties to a conflict can grant or deny at will; they are basic necessities that lie at the very essence of survival and the right to life, which the Security Council and its members have a responsibility to protect. The Council cannot let more people die on its watch.

As highlighted by the Emergency Relief Coordinator to the Security Council last Monday, there is no alternative to a political, negotiated solution to this desperate conflict. The Council and all the relevant stakeholders, in particular those that support the warring parties, must put their differences aside and place Syria on a firm path to peace.

In the meantime, I would reiterate the Emergency Relief Coordinator's call — on behalf of the humanitarian community and all people in need — that the parties to the conflict immediately end the practice of siege and starvation and fully adhere to international humanitarian law. That will require, first, facilitating full, unhindered, unconditional and sustained access to all people in need, including in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, for all types of assistance, including medical and surgical supplies. Secondly, it will require allowing freedom of movement for civilians, of all ages, to enter and exit besieged and hard-to-reach areas in safety and dignity, and permitting the immediate medical evacuation of sick and wounded patients to a safe place for treatment. Thirdly, this will require protecting civilians from any form of violence, including targeted or indiscriminate attacks, as well as from the use of explosive weapons or landmines in populated areas, at all times.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Kang for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to convey my gratitude to Ms. Kang for her briefing. The situation that she has just described illustrates, if there were need for it, the scale of the disaster that we have been witnessing for nearly five years now in Syria. This is the greatest tragedy of the century.

France asked the Security Council for an emergency meeting today with three complementary objectives: to ensure that everyone faces up to their responsibilities in connection with the human tragedy that is unfolding before our eyes in Madaya and other besieged cities in Syria; to maximize the pressure that the Council can exert to bring about the immediate lifting of the sieges and the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to all concerned areas; and, finally, to create the conditions necessary for the launch in a few days of the intra-Syrian dialogue, because there can be no credible political process without serious and tangible progress on the humanitarian track.

Close to 400,000 individuals are trapped in besieged cities in Syria, without any means of subsistence or any access by humanitarian workers. In addition to the cities of Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, tens of thousands of

individuals are besieged on the outskirts of Damascus, in eastern Ghutah, in Mouadamiya, in the rural area of Damascus, near Madaya, in Darayya, in Zabadani and in other localities.

Four and a half million people are living in hard-to-reach locations: 147 such cities and villages have been identified by the United Nations, of which only 32 per cent received aid in late 2015, according to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/962). The most vulnerable individuals, namely, women and children, are by definition the first victims. Humanitarian actors have these past few days described horrendous scenes: women and children dying of hunger in Madaya and other locations, because starvation is being used, just as it was in the Middle Ages, as a weapon of war and terror, and no one can say that they did not know.

Over and beyond the immediate lifting of all sieges, permanent, immediate and unrestricted access must be granted to humanitarian workers so as to ensure that they can assist all those in need. France wishes once again to underscore the primary responsibility borne by the regime. The most recent report of the Secretary-General states that although there were 91 requests for inter-agency convoys, only 13 were completed. Following long months of negotiations, the United Nations and its partners were able to distribute emergency assistance only twice to the people of Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, on 11 and 15 January. This is completely insufficient.

Access of emergency assistance to the civilian population is not, as Ms. Kang stated so eloquently, a favour or a concession granted by the Syrian regime. It is an absolute obligation under the Geneva Conventions. The Council has repeatedly and in multiple resolutions asked the regime and the other parties to the conflict to put an end to their use of starvation as a weapon of war, which is clearly prohibited under international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General underscored yesterday that this constituted a war crime. The Council has also asked that attacks that directly or indiscriminately target the civilian population in Syria come to an immediate end.

In extension of France's ongoing initiatives, we renew our calls for an immediate end to attacks against the civilian population, including through the use of barrel bombs and against civilian infrastructure, especially hospitals and schools. We call upon Syria to stop bombing the civilian population and call on Russia to act responsibly in the context of its military operations in Syria and to target only Council-designated terrorist groups. Humanitarian workers also fall victim to such attacks; 81 have died in Syria since the beginning of the conflict, and 27 have either disappeared or are being detained.

Finally, at a time when intra-Syrian negotiations, which are necessary to achieve peace in Syria, are about to be launched, I wish to reiterate that there will be no credible political process without an immediate improvement in the situation on the ground for the Syrian people.

In order to be able to believe in a genuine relaunching of the political process and the implementation of a ceasefire, the Syrians must no longer be the victims of deadly, indiscriminate attacks or subjected to arbitrary detention, and they must receive the humanitarian assistance and treatment that they urgently require. France will be very careful with respect to the options proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on the implementation of confidence-building and ceasefire measures, in conformity with resolution 2254 (2015), which clearly shows that when the Council wants to present a united front, it can.

A few days before the launch of a decisive cycle of intra-Syrian discussions, the Council must shoulder its responsibilities both to put an end to the humanitarian tragedy that we see reflected in the unbearable images of the concerned locations, and thus contribute to the creation of a credible political process that could finally lead to the peace to which we all aspire.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this urgent meeting, and I thank Ms. Kang for her sobering analysis of life in besieged and hard-to-reach areas in Syria.

In recent days, the world has seen this horror for itself. Images of emaciated men and women living under siege in Madaya, of children starving to death, evokes some of the darkest moments of our history. As a visiting United Nations official said earlier this week, there are people in Madaya, but no life. What we saw should not happen in this century. In the face of such horrors, we welcome the fact that the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent have reached Madaya this week. We should all applaud their efforts to negotiate a way in. But, sadly, it is long overdue. and for some it is too late. And as we learn more about the desperate situation facing those in Madaya, it becomes

ever clearer that ad hoc deliveries will not be enough. Sustained access is now needed.

Madaya is just the tip of the iceberg. This tragic town represents just 10 per cent of the besieged areas and only 1 percent of hard-to-reach areas in Syria. Many of these other areas have not been visited by the United Nations since October. If the status quo continues, the images that we have seen from Madaya could be repeated many, many times over.

We cannot allow this to happen with the eyes of the world on us today. Let us send a clear message to the warring parties: starving civilians as a method of warfare is inhuman, unacceptable and prohibited under international humanitarian law. As the Secretary-General said in his statement yesterday, in a conflict that has already reached shocking depths of inhumanity, the suffering in Madaya is another low. We agree with him that the Council should call on all the parties, and especially the regime, which has the primary responsibility to protect Syrians, to allow unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access. And let Council members with ties to the regime use their influence, not their air force, to address this horrific situation.

We all know that the solution is a political process that ends the war, and that to achieve that we must all work together. But, as we do that, it is only right that we also draw international attention to the desperate situation in Madaya — a situation that is only worsening. It is about putting pressure on all the parties to allow access so that the United Nations can reach the over 400,000 people in need in besieged areas, and the over 4 million people in hard-to-reach areas. The sheer scale of the humanitarian crisis should serve as a reminder to us all of the urgent need to support the United Nations relief effort. That is why the United Kingdom will host the London Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region, on 4 February — alongside the United Nations, Norway, Kuwait and Germany. The participation of my Prime Minister, the Emir of Kuwait, the German Chancellor, the Norwegian Prime Minister, as well as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in London next month gives a sense of the scale of our ambition.

The London Conference is about donor pledges. But it is also about much more than that. It is the moment to address the longer-term needs of those affected by the crisis by supporting job creation, by providing education and, crucially, by putting even more pressure on the parties to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law. At the Conference, leaders from 70 countries and from international organizations, civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector will confront and condemn violence against civilians. We will rally support to mitigate the human impact of the worse violations and abuses. We will commit essential support to deliver safer communities, safer health care and safer access to education in Syria. In doing that, we hope to drive improvements in daily life and to deliver important confidence-building measures to underpin the political process.

We should all be clear that the ultimate solution to Madaya's woes, and to those facing all Syrians, rests on a political agreement, one that brings an end to the fighting. We must continue the unity the Council showed in December and build on the agreement reached by the International Syria Support Group. We look forward to talks beginning later this month. To make a success of those talks, and for the long-term future of Syria, we also need to work now to ensure that communities are protected so that ultimately they can rebuild. To do that, we must emphasize that even wars have rules. It will be through those talks, through sustained access to besieged areas and through the London Conference that we can make this the year that suffering finally ends.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by expressing our gratitude for the briefing made today by Ms. Kang. The team coordinated by Stephen O'Brien is carrying out excellent work in Syria under very difficult circumstances. I would also like to thank France and the United Kingdom for their initiative, to which Spain subscribes.

While we thought that we had seen it all — or almost — in Syria, appalling images have now reached us through the media. Over the past month, six children under the age of 1 died in Madaya. The use of hunger as a tactic is a war crime according to the most elementary standards of international humanitarian law. Spain categorically condemns the deliberate obstruction of assistance to besieged populations in various areas in Syria. We are already too late, not only for those who have suffered from that latest episode of the war in Syria, but for the quarter of a million persons who lost their lives over the last five years. Our obligation therefore is to look ahead and to attempt to answer the following two questions: what can we do to improve the humanitarian situation and what can we do to help put an end to the conflict?

First of all, we must continue to closely follow the developments in Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya. As

co-penholder on the humanitarian situation in Syria, we have been in daily contact with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) throughout the entire assistance distribution effort, both here in New York and through the Amman regional office of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation. Our obligation — and here I am no longer referring to my country, but to the Security Council — is to ensure full compliance with resolution 2258 (2015), which we adopted unanimously on 22 December 2015. That was an initiative from Spain, Jordan and New Zealand. The first paragraph 1 of the resolution demands that all parties — I emphasize "all parties" — in particular the Syrian authorities, immediately comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. In the event that the delivery of assistance is interrupted in coming weeks, we will work with all Council members to adopt measures that will seek, first and foremost, to make that resolution more effective.

Secondly, we must address the growing number of unsuccessful requests for access in 2015. There is something amiss when OCHA can reach only 4 per cent of the population in besieged areas in Syria, as Mr. O'Brian informed us last Monday. Of the 133 requests submitted by the United Nations, almost 80 remain unanswered. We are not demanding that Syrian authorities accept just any request submitted by the United Nations. We are aware that there may be legitimate reasons to refuse a request. However, we do ask that they provide an affirmative reply in due time and form and without delay so that OCHA can react and take the measures that are appropriate in each case. Such a simple step can have a very positive impact on the ground.

Thirdly, Madaya accounts for only 10 per cent of the Syrian population under siege. To give just one example, approximately 200,000 people are still under siege by Daesh in Dayr al-Zawr. For that reason, we have asked OCHA to identify other at-risk areas and to deliver its analysis to the Security Council on 27 January. We would also suggest that the World Food Programme, together with OCHA, provide the Council with an oral briefing. Our main objective is to avoid a reoccurrence of what we have seen in Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya over the past few days.

Lastly, with regard to the political situation in Syria, we are at a critical juncture, with the prospect of a negotiation process within reach. Over the next few days there will be a series of steps that could be decisive. First of all, once again, the parties to the conflict, starting with the Syrian authorities, must fulfil their obligations in accordance with international humanitarian law. In that regard, I am referring to putting an end to the indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population, in particular the use of barrel bombs, and ensuring sustained and unconditional humanitarian access. Within the next three days, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria will present confidence-building options to the Security Council with the ultimate aim of reaching a ceasefire. Although I do not wish to prejudge the response, there are a wide array of measures, such as prisoner exchanges, that can bring some rapprochement on the ground with a view to the next round of negotiations in Geneva.

Resolution 2254 (2015) affords us a genuine opportunity to begin a new stage of dialogue between the regime and the opposition. The international community is prepared to support a political process in Syria. We trust that the parties to the conflict in Syria will not fail to take advantage of this opportunity. I conclude by once again expressing Spain's confidence in, and support to, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I, too, thank Assistant Secretary-General Kang for her briefing.

New Zealand is pleased that, since the Council met on Monday, a second series of aid convoys were able to enter Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya yesterday and that a third series of convoys is planned in the next few days. However, as others have said, that is just scratching the surface: that gets aid through to about 62,000 people. Humanitarian workers need safe, unimpeded and sustained access to the nearly 400,000 people trapped in besieged areas throughout Syria. It has now been confirmed that many of those people are suffering through conditions as horrific as we have seen recently in Madaya and elsewhere.

The Syrian Government is responsible for besieging some areas, but others, such as various opposition groups and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), are also using siege tactics. We demand that all those using siege tactics immediately meet their international legal obligation to allow humanitarian access. Tit-for-tat granting of humanitarian access is unacceptable. Civilians should not be used as pawns, as has been happening in Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya.

Only 25 kilometres outside of Damascus, people in Madaya have been waiting since Monday to be evacuated so they can receive the medical care they urgently need. It is a complex situation and the facts are still becoming clear. What is clear enough is that the need is urgent. While we are pleased that humanitarian agencies have received approval for the entry of mobile clinics and medical teams to support treatment, we cannot understand the Syrian Government's unwillingness to grant permission for people to be evacuated. We call on the Syrian authorities to immediately grant requests for medical evacuations of the sick.

New Zealand and many others, including the Secretary-General, have emphasized numerous times that the Syrian Government must approve, without delay, requests for inter-agency convoys. As my colleague from Spain has just said, in resolution 2258 (2015), adopted only last month, the Council expressed its concern at the decline in convoy approvals by the Syrian authorities and requested that they respond expeditiously and positively to all requests for cross-line deliveries. We cannot accept that administrative delays continue to block humanitarian assistance from reaching those in need. As Ms. Kang said, the approval procedures must be simplified and carried out more quickly. Delivering aid in Syria is extremely complex and dangerous for the people delivering the aid. It would be unsafe to try to deliver aid without Government consent and risk attacks. Over 80 humanitarian workers have lost their lives since the conflict began. We do not want to see that number rise.

Intentionally starving civilians as a method of warfare has happened repeatedly during the Syrian conflict. What we are seeing today in Madaya is an alarming echo of the siege and starvation of civilians in Homs in 2014. The deliberate starving of civilians is not a natural, collateral effect of conflict. It is a conscious decision made by the besieging parties. It violates international humanitarian law. It violates Council resolutions. It may constitute a war crime.

New Zealand and Spain intend to invite the World Food Programme to brief on access to food in besieged areas at the next humanitarian consultations on Syria, on 27 January. In the meantime, New Zealand demands that the Syrian Government and other parties to the conflict immediately lift all sieges in Syria and allow the free movement of civilians and lifesaving goods. We also call on countries with influence with responsible parties to use that influence to lift the sieges. If they stand by and do nothing, they too are complicit.

The situation is so desperate that all forms of aid delivery should be considered. In that respect, we would be interested in the view of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the feasibility of delivering assistance via airdrops. Lifting the sieges and parties abiding by their obligations under international humanitarian law would help build trust and momentum ahead of the upcoming talks in Geneva. We look forward to discussing such matters in more depth with Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura on Monday. We all know that only a political solution will end the suffering of the Syrian people.

Let me conclude by commending the bravery and tireless work of the humanitarian workers working on the ground, including the United Nations, led by Humanitarian Coordinator Yacoub El Hillo, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Red Crescent.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, as it is the first time that Senegal takes the floor in a public meeting of the Security Council since we received the trust of the General Assembly and became a non-permanent member of the Council, I would like to reaffirm that the Government of Senegal is wedded to the ideals of peace, security and justice throughout the world.

It is in that spirit that my delegation would like to welcome the joint initiative taken by the United Kingdom and France to put this briefing on the agenda of the Security Council in the form of an emergency meeting given the very difficult situation experienced by millions of Syrians, especially in besieged areas. The fact that the Security Council decided to address the issue for a second time in less than a week clearly shows that the international community is greatly concerned about the indescribable suffering experienced by the Syrian people. The situation tugs at our collective conscience. We must act promptly as a result of the special responsibility borne by the Council to maintain international peace and security.

I would like to commend Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for the clarity of her briefing. That clarity has enabled us to better understand the realities on the ground. I would

also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outstanding work carried out by all of the humanitarian personnel active in this very difficult region and working for such a noble cause, sometimes placing their very lives at risk.

While recognizing the progress that was achieved in providing humanitarian assistance to the city of Madaya, where over 40,000 individuals face the threat of starvation, as well as in Fu'ah and Kafraya, Senegal remains deeply concerned regarding the fate of 400,000 other individuals in other besieged areas and in places that are difficult to access. It is for that reason that we call for the implementation of resolution 2258 (2015), adopted on 22 December 2015, which urges all parties to immediately implement the international humanitarian law and human rights law obligations incumbent upon them, especially by taking the necessary steps to facilitate humanitarian aid access to the population, especially the many people in need of emergency assistance.

To achieve that, all players must take all the necessary measures to lift restrictions on the provision of humanitarian assistance, while remaining mindful of the fact that certain practices, such as the use of hunger as a weapon of war, can be interpreted as being war crimes and crimes against humanity. The situation is so dire that, in a joint statement on 12 January, three United Nations agencies — the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Development Programme — launched an urgent appeal to raise $8 billion over this year to assist 22.5 million people in Syria and the wider region. The World Health Organization is concerned that there is a serious health risk in Syria, where 57 per cent of health facilities and 51 per cent of medical centres have been partially or completely destroyed. In that regard, the appeal launched by the agency, which already faces a very serious shortage of funding, for the mobilization of $45 million to provide assistance to 11 million Syrians in the country in 2016 is worthy of our full attention.

Finally, our common challenge is to ensure that tackling the humanitarian situation of refugees and displaced Syrians takes place in complement to the political process — perhaps even before it. Substantial progress was achieved in 2015, including the unanimous adoption by the Security Council, on 18 December 2015, of resolution 2254 (2015), within the context of the ministerial session, with a crucial agreement on the terms of the negotiations of the political process of a future ceasefire and the fight against terrorism.

It would be remiss of me to conclude without paying tribute to the initiative of the United Kingdom to convene, in London on 4 February, a donor conference on the provision of assistance to the civilian population of Syria, a population affected by a war in its sixth year. The results are ghastly: 250,000 dead, 4.5 million refugees and 13 million displaced persons.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China pays tribute to you, Mr. President, for holding today's public meeting, and thanks the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Coordinator, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, for her briefing.

The Syrian conflict, which has gone on for five years, has caused a huge number of civilian casualties and triggered a serious humanitarian crisis and refugee crisis. In particular, the population in some besieged faces a severe shortage of food and medicine, and their living conditions are truly appalling. China is deeply saddened by the humanitarian situation in Syria and sympathizes with the Syrian people in their suffering. We urge all the parties in Syria to effectively implement the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and to go all out to work with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to carry out full-fledged relief activities in all besieged areas and alleviate the burning needs of the population. China hopes that the international humanitarian pledging conference on Syria, to be held early next month, will achieve positive results. We call on international donors to show generosity so as to ease the suffering of the Syrian people.

China has been actively supporting efforts to ease the humanitarian situation in Syria. So far, through various channels, China has provided, on nine different occasions, humanitarian assistance to Syria totalling RMB/ ¥ 685 million. At the Group of 20 Summit held last year, President Xi Jinping announced an additional $100 million of humanitarian assistance to the relevant countries and international organizations. We are ready, together with the international community, to play our part in easing the humanitarian crisis in Syria and improving the livelihoods of the Syrian people.

Achieving a political solution to the question of Syria is the best way to resolve the relevant questions on Syria, including on its humanitarian dimension. The

international community should remain steadfast in its search for a political solution. As the humanitarian situation worsens, there is a greater need to push for a political solution. The International Syria Support Group has held three ministerial-level meetings so far. Last month, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015). That was the first resolution ever adopted by the Council on the political process in Syria. It consolidated the common understanding of the international community for a political solution. It has injected vitality into the search for a political solution. It is truly a hard-won result.

The priority facing the international community is to keep alive the current positive momentum for a political solution and to make sure that the relevant process will stay the course and produce results. At the same time, it is necessary to make sure that the United Nations continues to be the main channel for mediation. China calls upon the parties in Syria to seize this historic opportunity, swiftly restart negotiations and approach the political process in Syria in such a way that real results can be achieved soon. China is ready, together with the parties concerned, to continue to play a positive and constructive role in finding a political solution to the Syrian question.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our deep regret at the deteriorating humanitarian situation being borne by the Syrian people, inside and outside the country. I also express our thanks and gratitude to all United Nations humanitarian workers and those of other organizations for the assistance provided to the Syrian people.

The continuation of the Syrian crisis over the past few years and the escalation of its militarization have led to acute deterioration in many areas. I express our condemnation of all targeting of civilians in conflict areas and all explotiation of civilians as a war tactic by means of starvation, laying siege or using civilians as humanitarian shields. Since the outbreak of this humanitarian crisis, particularly in Madaya, Kafraya, Fu'ah and Muadamiyet al-Sham, Egypt has established close contacts with many United Nations officials, Syrian businessmen, members of the opposition and members of the Syrian Government, with a view to finding speedy solutions that meet the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people, particuarly in besieged areas, regardless of their affiliations. We remain confident that humanitarian work should rise above political differences. In that regard, Egypt welcomes the arrival of some assistance to those areas and encourages all parties to continue their cooperation with the United Nations and other emergency relief organizations in order to avoid the recurrence of such tragedies.

The Security Council is tackling the many different aspects of the crisis in Syria, in spite of the differences of opinion over certain issues. Egypt believes that, when it comes to humanitarian issues, the international community and the members of the Security Council should remain united, particularly since we see that certain countries attempt at times to take advantage of political situations. We appeal to all parties to refrain from politicizing the crisis of the Syrian people or using it as a means of bringing pressure to bear, since that would lead only to further suffering for the civilians in this conflict and would increase division among the different parties.

We reiterate that putting an end to the suffering of the Syrian people requires a political solution that puts an end to armed conflict and lays the basis for a democratic State. We appeal to all members of the Security Council and to the International Syria Support Group to do their utmost to preserve the political path and the plan of action agreed within the Vienna process, endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2254 (2015). We also appeal to all parties to work towards that purpose, after so many years of stalemate. We warn that any attempts to derail the current political efforts would lead only to further escalation of the armed conflict and to a vicious circle that would perpetuate the crisis.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefing on the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and for the work carried out by Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, together with Mr. Stephen O'Brien, in leading that office.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela rejects the siege tactics carried out by any of the parties to the conflict against civilians, which violate international law and international human rights law and constitute a war crime. In Syria, there is a complex war with a high level of violence and a diversity of actors in the armed conflict. In addressing such a sensitive issue, therefore, we must do so in a balanced way and refrain from politicizing human rights and ensure that such siege practices are put to an end.

The Syrian Government is responsible for protecting its citizens, and it has done so in areas that are under its control and even areas beyond its control. That is a fact that has been reflected in United Nations reports. It is our hope that cooperation between OCHA and the Syrian authorities will continue and be strengthened beyond what we are now seeing. However, we are concerned by the fact that whatever is done in this tragic situation is never enough and that there are hundreds of thousands of Syrians under siege by various non-State armed groups and terrorist groups, with whom one cannot even negotiate to make them respect international law and international humanitarian law.

We therefore regret that the Syrian humanitarian issue has been politicized since the conflict began. We believe that humanitarian assistance must be focused on meeting all the needs of those on the ground and those who have crossed the border to other countries in search of security. It is therefore vital to have the support and consent of the Government of Syria, as established in United Nations resolutions.

The main enemy of Syria and the region is the self-proclaimed Islamic State and the other terrorist organizations operating in that brotherly country. The world witnessed the atrocities perpetrated by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) when Palmyra fell and ISIS went in and destroyed the heritage of humankind, slaughtering people in its path, including the world-renowned archaeologist Khaled Mohamad al-Asaad, while the world watched in astonishment and the Security Council stood by in silence.

On many occasions our country has expressed its dismay about the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. When the Council met to renew the mandate of resolution 2191 (2014) last December (see S/PV.7595), we expressed our interest in seeing the humanitarian assistance mechanism reach the ares most in need. Based on the most recent report of the Secretary-General, dated 11 December 2015 (S/2015/962), more than 212,000 people remain under siege by ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front and associated groups. We await a strategy by OCHA for tackling that problem. In that context, we are concerned by the statement by Mr. Yacoub El Hillo, OCHA Resident Coordinator, on the delicate situation of more than 42,000 people in the vicinity of Madaya, who are at risk of starvation, as well as the more than 20,000 people in Kafraya and Fu'ah, who unfortunately do not seem to have aroused the same interest. We welcome the positive response of the Syrian Government, as indicated in the joint statement, to facilitating access to humanitarian convoys. In that regard, we have heard reports of a second delivery of assistance to Madaya, Kafraya and Fu'ah in the last few hours. We hope that this coordination and cooperation will be extended to the entire Syrian territory.

We would like to express our appreciation for the work carried out by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and OCHA, which, in coordination with the Government, has enabled humanitarian assistance to reach the populations of Madaya, Kafraya and Fu'ah. In less than two days, 200 volunteers and aid workers dispatched 45 convoys to Madaya to reach 40,000 people, and another 18 convoys to Kafraya and Fu'ah intended for approximately 20,000 people. In that context, it is important to draw attention to the safety guarantees that must be upheld by non-State actors to ensure that the assistance reaches the civilians in need, and not the fighters. Similarly, the parties must guarantee the safety and security of humanitarian workers in such difficult conditions.

We recognize the noble efforts of the humanitarian agencies in Syria, whose work takes place under difficult conditions owing to the same conflict in which the country and its people have been plunged in extremely poor conditions. For that reason, we condemn the attacks against personnel and the facilities in which they carry out their noble work. It is unacceptable that humanitarian personnel be military targets by any of the parties.

Over the past five years, we have seen how the country and its population have suffered the ravages of terrorist groups, making Syria a place where they try out and promote their savagery in order to impose their totalitarian vision. Unfortunately, it seems that the international community has not yet acknowledged the danger that the extremist ideas represent for the future of humankind, given the way some media have portrayed certain leaders of some of those groups as moderates, concealing their long record of intolerance and hatred, in order to advance the particular political agendas of a few stakeholders. We stress that the areas controlled by ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front and their allies are a genuine challenge for humanitarian organizations and for the international community. All efforts made to reduce the operational capacity of those groups will benefit the civilian population and help bring about a negotiated political solution to the conflict.

In December 2015, we held a ministerial meeting with the aim of promoting the paths towards peace and political dialogue. We must seize the opportunity that has arisen and decisively strengthen the peace process. The resolution of the humanitarian crisis in Syria is tied to the ceasefire set forth in resolution 2254 (2015) and the initiation of peace talks among the warring parties and among Syrians themselves. Furthermore, the Council must fulfil its role of overcoming the obstacles to restoring the peace that was snatched from the people of Syria. We call on all parties negotiating in Geneva to reach a political solution to this terrible armed conflict to act in good faith and without preconditions. We must coordinate our efforts and move together in the same direction. It is important that we maintain the momentum that was reached last December and that nothing stands in our way from continuing on the road towards peace.

Finally, we reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy for the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to bring about a peaceful political solution to this conflict and we await his report due next Monday. We must remain united in the Security Council in support of a political solution to the conflict as the only effective way to resolve the terrible humanitarian tragedy being experienced by the people of Syria.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is my first opportunity to address the Security Council in an open meeting, I would like to underscore that Japan is prepared to work with you, Mr. President, and all the members of the Council to achieve international peace and security. I would also like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the important office of President of the Security Council in the first month of its work this year. We thank you for convening today's emergency meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

My sincere gratitude goes to Ms. Kyung-wha Kang for shedding light on the grave situation in Syria.

The Syrian crisis, now entering its sixth year, represents one of the worst humanitarian crises of our generation. The numbers speak for themselves. Out of a population of approximately 17 million, 12 million Syrians — half of them children — require assistance. However, for the 4.5 million who live in so-called "hard-to-reach areas, assistance reaches them only sporadically. Indeed, 400,000 individuals live under siege and lack access to humanitarian aid. That is more than 10 per cent of the population of your country, Mr. President.

The town of Madaya is but one example of the plight faced by countless Syrians on a daily basis. Recent images of United Nations convoys entering the town provided momentary relief. I would like to reiterate our utmost appreciation to the humanitarian aid staff, whose courageous and invaluable efforts continue to save lives. But how much longer must Syrians live at the peril of aid-delivery approvals? The case of Madaya and today's briefing by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs remind us that the situation is far from resolved.

In resolution 2254 (2015), adopted in December, the Council expressed its strong support for a political solution to the crisis. We look forward to the convening of the first intra-Syrian dialogue on 25 January. Japan will continue to support the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and the United Nations-facilitated political process towards a political transition based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) in its entirety.

The dire humanitarian situation must be addressed regardless of the political process. Why must Syrians endure the same suffering only weeks after the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), which demanded that all parties immediately comply with their obligations under international law? Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made it very clear yesterday at the General Assembly that the use of food as a weapon of war is a war crime and that all sides are committing atrocious acts prohibited under international humanitarian law.

Let us not forget that the success of the political process is contingent on the support of the Syrian people. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the goal of the political process and efforts undertaken in the Council are to end the suffering of the Syrian people on the ground.

The indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the impediments against humanitarian access undermine the mutual confidence necessary for a political solution. While all actors are accountable for the protection of civilians, the Government of Syria has the primary responsibility of protecting its own citizens. The protection of civilians is an obligation under international humanitarian law. We call on all parties to provide rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian

access, as called for in Council resolutions. In that regard, we particularly call on States that constitute the International Syria Support Group to use their influence to that end.

The humanitarian situation in Syria also requires the solidarity of the international community by way of increased assistance. Since 2011, Japan has disbursed more than $1.1 billion in humanitarian aid, including food, sanitation and other assistance to Syrians and neighbouring host countries. We are nonetheless concerned that only 43 per cent of funding needs were met in 2015. With our eyes set on the eventual resolution of the crisis and the return of Syrians to their homes, our assistance should not be limited to immediate life-saving assistance, such as food and medical supplies, but should also cover assistance such as vocational training and educational aid to assist Syrians on their paths towards self-reliance.

The coming London conference in February will be a critical opportunity to demonstrate the resolve and solidarity of the international community with those suffering on the ground. We look forward to participating at the conference, where Japan will announce, pending approval of our Diet, a substantial new assistance package. The package will include immediate relief such as food and assistance in the form of vocational training for Syrians. Our assistance will also go to surrounding countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

When United Nations convoys entered the besieged town of Madaya this week, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affaris reported having witnessed people who seemed to have lost hope that the world cared about them. Madaya is a wake-up call about the continued suffering of millions of people in Syria. I would like to thank France and the United Kingdom for requesting today's emergency meeting, as well as Spain and New Zealand for having been instrumental in promoting critical Security Council resolutions on this issue. We, the Council, must remain vigilant and not condone the humanitarian violations forced upon millions of Syrians.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, who provided us with a clear picture of the latest developments in the situation in the besieged areas in Syria.

It has been roughly a week since the world has come to know the horrifying truth surrounding the siege of Madaya, located just 25 kilometres from the capital city of Damascus. Everybody was shocked by the graphic images of death and starvation coming out of the town, something that is virtually impossible to imagine nowadays. The level of savagery that the people of Madaya have been subjected to can only be compared to the Nazi atrocities during the Second World War. We extend our deepest sympathies to the innocent Syrian people who are suffering indiscriminately as a result of the terrible ongoing conflict in their country.

We welcome the delivery of the second batch of humanitarian aid to Madaya and call on all sides of the Syrian conflict, including the Syrian Government, to show consistency in providing the United Nations with unhindered access to the town and other besieged areas, as required under international law and pursuant to resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). We support the statement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who said yesterday that those responsible for this atrocity must be prosecuted. We want to remind everyone in Syria that anyone deliberately using starvation as a weapon is committing a war crime and will be held accountable sooner or later.

I would like to ask a specific question. At a meeting a few days ago, we were informed that nearly 400 residents of the town required immediate medical care and evacuation. What happened to them? If they were not evacuated, we would like to know precisely who prevented the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs from taking care of them. We believe that it is an obligation of the Security Council, without delay, to come up with a document establishing stronger responsibility and accountability for those who target civilians in Syria. As a country that experienced an artificial famine in the early 1930s, Ukraine calls on the Council to make its voice heard when it says that using starvation as a method of warfare by either side cannot and will not be tolerated.

Finally, some of us in the Security Council may have different opinions on the political situation in Syria, but we should stand united when it comes to addressing the humanitarian crisis in the country, which has already suffered so much in the course of the past five years.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are concerned by the very complex

humanitarian situation in Syria, which has arisen as a result of the continuing internal armed conflict. We note the efforts that have been undertaken by the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations and by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. It is of critical importance that all sides to the conflict — as well as the States enjoying influence over them — make every possible effort to provide all the basic necessities to the inhabitants of the besieged cities. We are undertaking the relevant contacts with the relevant Syrian authorities, prompting them towards constructive cooperation with the humanitarian structures of the United Nations.

Of particular concern, however, is the situation of the inhabitants of the cities besieged by fighters of the terrorist groups Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic State, Ahrar Al-Sham and Jaysh Al-Islam, which hide behind civilians and use them as human shields, kidnap them for ransom and loot humanitarian assistance convoys. Even groups acting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army are guilty of these violations.

The kinds of issues that we are discussing today require an objective, comprehensive and professional approach that takes account of the realities of the region. Reference has been made to Madaya, but not a word has been said about other areas such as Nubul and Al-Zahraa, in the province of Aleppo, and here we are speaking of the fates of tens of thousands of individuals.

United Nations humanitarian agencies are fully aware of the efforts that were undertaken to lift the sieges on the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp and in the area of Al-Waer, where there has been very strong compliance with the agreements reached by all the sides. If we look at the situation practically, however, humanitarian shipments to the problem areas that were referred to today, including Madaya, take place with the active assistance of the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. This has been confirmed by the staff of United Nations humanitarian agencies, who are monitoring the delivery of aid to the city. A second convoy is heading for Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, and a third is being prepared for 17 January.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator, Yacoub El Hilio, has taken note of the satisfactory situation concerning the continuing direct contacts between the World Health Organization and the Government of Syria regarding the issue of organizing an emergency medical evacuation of civilians in need thereof.

Humanitarian operations have also been launched by the Russian armed forces active in Syria, upon the request of that Government. Assistance has been sent to the city of Dayr al-Zawr, which is currently under siege by terrorists. We have not heard a word about this in our meeting today. Russian parachute pallets have made it possible to deliver 22 tons of cargo. Work on this track will, of course, continue.

The Security Council is paying close attention to the humanitarian situation in Syria. This is already the second meeting this week on this issue. Today we are meeting in an open format, and we would note that even from the perspective of the Council's standing practice, this is somewhat unusual. Very soon, on 27 January, we will be discussing the humanitarian aspects of the Syrian crisis, following the issuance of the monthly report of the Secretary-General.

It is almost as if, under the pretext of the deteriorating situation in besieged cities and regions, attempts were being made to derail the launch of the intra-Syrian talks planned for 25 January. All of this runs counter to resolution 2254 (2015), pursuant to which there must be no preconditions to the launch of the talks. Humanitarian issues must form an integral component of the intra-Syrian negotiations, and yet experience has shown that when no one interferes with the sides, they can quickly reach a lasting agreement.

As the launch of the inter-Syrian talks grows closer, there is a great deal of unnecessary noise and an increased use of the dishonest tactic, previously used on many occasions, of politicizing humanitarian issues, and the issue is being raised in international forums with, unfortunately, double standards prevailing once again. It is clear that those behind this do not like the Vienna agreement and will not abandon their doomed plan for a forceful solution in Syria. We have not forgotten the level of opposition we had to overcome to ensure that resolution 2254 (2015) included mention of the Vienna Statements. Even those States that played a positive role in elaborating the Vienna decisions and Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) could be more consistent and focused when it comes to its implementation.

However, one cannot avoid resolving the fundamental issues, namely, those of promoting dialogue on resolving the Syrian issue. This most important thing now is to compile a representative list

of Syrian opposition delegations and to consolidate the list of terrorist organizations active in Syria.

But there is one other, no less important issue: the fact that there is no alternative to forging a broad, intergovernmental form of cooperation among States, including on the military presence in Syria, so as to enhance the effectiveness of the fight against terrorist organizations. The proposals made by the Russian Federation in this respect remain on the table.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): Let me start by thanking you, Mr. President, for having organized this afternoon's meeting. Let me also thank Assistant Secretary-General Kyung-wha Kang for her briefing.

It is absolutely unacceptable by any standards to allow as many as 400,000 people or more to continue living and dying in besieged areas in Syria. For this reason, we support all initiatives aimed at denouncing such situations in the strongest possible terms and applying the necessary political pressure to decisively end this tragic situation and state of affairs.

We warmly welcome the access of humanitarian convoys to the town of Madaya and to other places under siege by rebels in the north-west part of Syria. We commend the outstanding efforts by the humanitarian community, which, against all odds, keeps on working to save lives and provide the minimum necessary comfort to the Syrian people, who are in absolute distress.

Our praise goes also to the Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Mr. Yacoub El Hillo, and to the personnel of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, who in the past few days were able to deliver much-needed provisions and medical supplies, including blankets and clothing. We sincerely hope that increased pressure will force the Government and the opposition forces to continue allowing regular and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid to all besieged areas in Syria.

The eloquent statement made by the Secretary-General yesterday described the situation in Madaya as having reached a shocking depth of inhumanity owing to the suffering to which women and men, including children and the elderly, are subjected. Reports of people dying from starvation or being killed by snipers or landmines while trying to flee amount to war crimes, as the Secretary-General has pointed out. Those responsible for such despicable actions must be held accountable.

In the political process, in particular if that process is to succeed, the warring parties must show a genuine commitment to respecting the basic tenets of international humanitarian law and human rights law. They must put an end to the suffering of the civilian population, in particular those trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. We hope that the preparations of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Steffan de Mistura, for the political talks between the Syrian Government and the Syrian opposition in Geneva, due to start on 25 January, will continue unhindered, and that a political solution to this humanitarian catastrophe can be achieved as soon as possible.

With the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), a commitment was made to accelerate efforts to achieve a ceasefire that would run in parallel to the political process, pursuant to the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), and move the political process ahead expeditiously. As such, the modalities and requirements for a ceasefire must be determined, and the necessary pressure applied on all the parties, in order to enable the lifting of all sieges on civilian-populated areas, thereby facilitating the political settlement to the Syrian conflict. That remains the only way to stop the tragedy now afflicting the people of Syria. In that connection, we look forward to hearing the briefing that will be delivered to the Council next Monday by Mr. De Mistura.

The people of Syria need adequate responses from the Security Council. It is our duty to respond in order to give peace a chance.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join earlier speakers in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Kang for her briefing, which provided a vital update on ongoing efforts to respond to the critical health needs of civilians in the hard-to-reach and besieged areas in Syria.

We deplore the unacceptable human cost of the ongoing conflict. It is simply staggering that more than 400,000 Syrians live under siege conditions, a tool of warfare that hearkens back to the Middle Ages and which civilized nations and people have since rejected. It is unimaginable that, in the twenty-first century, parties to the Syrian conflict would resort to the deplorable tactic of besieging cities and starving whole populations, including women and children, as a strategy of war. The employment of that strategy adds another inhumane and horrifying dimension to the Syrian conflict.

Earlier this week, we were heartened by the breakthrough made by the United Nations and its partners in securing safe passage for and conducting humanitarian relief missions in the besieged towns of Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya. We call on all parties to ensure that such access continues to be provided to those towns. We expect that access for humanitarian relief and supplies will be granted to other hard-to-reach areas, including those under siege by various parties to the conflict.

Malaysia shares the concerns about the plight of the 400 people in immediate need of medical evacuation from Madaya, as highlighted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We urge the relevant authorities to expedite their immediate evacuation. For those whose condition makes evacuation impossible, we would demand that the necessary providers of medical assistance be given unimpeded and expedited access to Madaya. While my delegation welcomes the lifting of the blockade against Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, we stress that all parties to the conflict have an unequivocal responsibility to protect civilians at all times. The besiege-and-starve strategy, which callously devalues human life and violates international law, should cease.

In addition to the daily struggle to survive the hail of bullets and bombs, the situation of ordinary Syrians, including those under siege, is increasingly precarious, in particular with the onset of winter. We wish to underscore that a political solution to the conflict requires no further amplification. For that, the enablers must be put in place. Malaysia affirms its support for the initiative led by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for a political resolution to the Syrian conflict as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). In that connection, we call on all the relevant parties to participate in the talks facilitated by the United Nations, which are scheduled to take place 25 January, without preconditions. Syria and ordinary Syrians have bled long enough.

In conclusion, while we are hopeful that the upcoming talks can pave the way for a sustained truce or a cessation of hostilities among the various parties, particularly between the Government and the opposition forces, the dire humanitarian crisis faced by ordinary Syrians necessitates urgent action by the international community to ensure the safe passage and conduct of humanitarian assistance, aid and relief to those most in need, especially those in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. We call on States with influence on the parties to the conflict to do their utmost to ensure that the sieges end and that humanitarian aid be made accessible to all.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Kang for the very sobering briefing. I would also like to thank my fellow Security Council members for organizing the meeting on short notice.

At the outset, I want to commend the brave United Nations and humanitarian workers who are carrying out lifesaving work in Syria under the deeply challenging circumstances of a conflict zone. Their work is courageous and deeply valued. Millions depend on them.

We have come to the Chamber today because the world has been profoundly shaken by the display of the sheer brutality of the Al-Assad regime in Syria. The reports of starvation coming out of Madaya have truly shocked our conscience and our sense of humanity. Most disturbing is the fact that this is not just a single instance of horror and cruelty. Rather, this is part of a deliberate and systematic siege-and-starve tactic employed by the regime against civilians across Syria — another barbaric act in a conflict full of such acts. The Council has adopted one resolution after another on humanitarian access. And yet, over the past year, we have only seen the suffering of Syrians deepen to outrageous levels. This cannot go on.

We welcome the two United Nations shipments made to Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya this week. It is lifesaving assistance, but it is not nearly enough and it is coming far too late. Before Monday, the 40,000 people in Madaya trapped by the Syrian regime and its allies, including Hizbollah, had received almost no humanitarian aid since October. Therefore, although the shipments made this week are necessary, the need is much greater. At least 32 people, including infants, have died from starvation in the past 30 days, according to the latest updates from humanitarian workers. The United Nations has reported that more than 400 people are near death due to starvation — those are just the cases that we know about, there could well be more. The only two doctors in the town — two doctors for all 40,000 people — have very limited ability to treat this sick and weakened community. Madaya's hospital has been destroyed, and the one remaining medical facility faces severe shortages of medicines, supplies and health personnel. The facility consists of one large room where, earlier this week, humanitarian

workers saw 20 weakened people suffering from severe malnutrition, sleeping on the cold, hard floor without mattresses.

When United Nations and International Committee of the Red Cross workers arrived in Madaya on Monday, the grateful local distribution committee insisted on providing a meal, trying their best to offer hospitality, truly generous of spirit, yet all they had to offer was hot salted water with very few grains of floating rice. Madaya has had no bread for nearly five months, and what food is available is sold at exorbitant prices: 1 kilogram of sugar costs $150 and 1 kilogram of rice costs $200. Madaya has simply been cut off from the world. Civilians who have tried to escape or to find food have been killed or injured by anti-personnel mines and sniper fire by pro-regime forces. Since the Syrian regime has cut off power and fuel for generators, the residents of this mountain town — where temperatures are now dropping often below freezing — must simply risk their lives to collect firewood to keep their children warm at night. That must change.

We reiterate calls on the Syrian regime to allow immediate, regular, unconditional and unimpeded access. The United Nations formally made a request to the Syrian regime three days ago to bring in mobile medical units and medical teams to Madaya to conduct nutrition assessments and to treat the most critical cases. That request was just approved today, but the units and teams must arrive immediately, with no further delays.

The exhausted medical personnel in Madaya urgently need this support to stabilize and treat those who are severely malnourished. The most dire cases — the 400 people the United Nations identified as near death due to starvation — must be treated or evacuated to a safe location immediately. The stories of horror coming out of Syria have become so chillingly commonplace. but they simply cannot make us numb: families trying to survive on what cannot even be called soup, just hot water and boiled spices, young babies unable to feed because their mothers suffer from such serious malnutrition and frail elders wasting away to nothingness. We cannot just become immune to the stories of their plight.

We, as a Council, must demand rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to the residents of Madaya and all civilians in Syria, not merely as a matter of implementing Security Council resolutions, but as a moral imperative. As we all know, the hunger, suffering, and obstruction of humanitarian access should never have happened in the first place and it is by no means limited to Madaya.

The Damascus suburbs towns of Mouadamiya and Daraya are also worth highlighting. since they also continue to be strangled by the Syrian regime. Madaya is just one of 12 areas in Syria besieged by the regime, while armed opposition groups have surrounded civilians in Fu'ah and Kafraya and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has surrounded Dayr al-Zawr. In addition to the 400,000 in those besieged areas, 4 million more Syrians are in hard-to-reach areas where it is increasingly difficult for the United Nations to send assistance.

Denying humanitarian access to anyone, anywhere, must stop. While we welcome the United Nations progress towards meeting the needs of those in Madaya, Fu'ah, and Kafraya, one-off deliveries are not a solution to the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the besiegement of communities. All communities should be guaranteed access to food, medicine and basic goods. That has to be our goal. And since we only saw access deteriorate and malnutrition and starvation increase in 2015, we all have to re-examine the strategies to do better.

In the past year, we saw the number of Syrians who need humanitarian relief increase to 13.5 million, which is another 1.3 million in need. The number of Syrians receiving aid in hard-to-reach areas continues to dramatically decline, from 1.1 million in 2014 to 625,000 in 2015. In besieged areas, on average only 3 per cent received humanitarian assistance, as Assistant Secretary-General Kang just noted. We must stop acting as though such suffering is simply inevitable. In the past year, the Syrian regime did not even respond to more than half of requests from the United Nations to deliver assistance across conflict lines. According to the United Nations, if the regime approved such outstanding requests, 1.4 million people would receive assistance. As a United Nations partner, the United States intends to help in developing strategies to reverse the trends of the past year.

The Syrian regime must minimize administrative procedures. We, as a Council, must effectively press the parties to implement the resolutions we have adopted. In that regard, we request that the United Nations immediately bring to the attention of the Council any obstacles to humanitarian access so that we may take action.

The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) discussed the need to take steps to ensure expeditious humanitarian access throughout Syria, according to resolution 2165 (2014). And the ISSG called for United Nations pending requests for humanitarian deliveries to be granted. In resolution 2254 (2015), the Council called on ISSG States to use their influence immediately to those ends.

As we have said before, the only way to stop the violence and end Syria's conflict is through advancing a negotiated political transition as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). But while we work toward that goal, Syrians literally cannot wait — whether for food, medicine or clean water. It is critical that the Syrian regime and all parties allow immediate, unconditional and unfettered humanitarian assistance to reach all of those in need. All States Members of the United Nations must unite in pressuring the Syrian Government, or any actor over which it has leverage, to grant access to Madaya and to all communities across Syria.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Uruguay.

First, I thank Assistant Secretary-General Kang for her briefing. The content of her statement was profoundly moving.

The Government of Uruguay is deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria. Above and beyond the many efforts being made to find a solution to this protracted conflict, the humanitarian situation for the Syrian people continues to be a devastating one and has been exacerbated by the practices of their own Government, rebel armed groups and terrorist organizations. Uruguay demands that all parties to the conflict allow humanitarian aid convoys to have access to the entire country, without delay — and particularly those areas that are under siege by any one of those parties.

Widespread hunger and malnutrition in areas such as Madaya, Fu'ah, Kafraya, Dayr al-Zawr, Daraya, areas in eastern Ghouta and the environs of the capital of Damascus is utterly unacceptable. The arrival, yesterday and Monday, of humanitarian aid convoys in Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya is a positive sign, but it must be followed by immediate and unconditional access of humanitarian aid convoys in response to requests by United Nations agencies and its partners on the ground in Syria. We demand that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, a State Member of the United Nations, comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law and cease to impede aid that would ease the tremendous suffering of its people. That same obligation is also incumbent upon other non-State actors in the conflict, who are also responsible for such an affront to the most basic norms of civilization. Keeping the people of those areas close to starvation as a weapon is a war crime, which is exacerbated by the fact that they are unable to escape or flee for their lives. This is a clear breach of international humanitarian law.

Sooner or later, all those responsible for these atrocities must account for their actions. The Government of Uruguay hopes that resolution 2258 (2015), adopted in December, and the intensive efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura, will enable humanitarian access without obstacles or delays. Uruguay is confident that, in the next few days, the bases set out by resolution 2254 (2015) for the start of the transition and the ceasefire in Syria will be established. That is a sine qua none for preventing the ongoing deterioration of the living conditions of the population. They must recover, as soon as possible, their right to live in peace and enjoy the most basic human rights, which have been continously violated by all the warring parties since the beginning of the conflict.

In the midst of all this, we pay tribute to all persons on the ground who are risking their own lives to provide humanitarian assistance to the innocent victims of these atrocities.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to start by congratulating your country, Sir, on its election as non-permament member of the Security Council and on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of January.

This morning we addressed two identical letters to the Secretary-General and to the President of the General Assembly concerning the emergency humanitarian work undertaken by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

It is well known that one of the essential principles of humanitarian assistance is the avoidance of all

politicization and double standards. This has been clearly established in the United Nations guidelines on the provision of humanitarian emergency assistance, as provided in General Assembly resolution 46/182. Unfortunately, some use humanitarian issues to further their political agendas. The problem is that this runs counter to the guiding principles of United Nations humanitarian action, and does not serve humanitarian action as a whole. Therefore, such action is immoral, and the objective is not to assist those in need, but rather to exploit their suffering to achieve specific political goals. Those who wish to help the people in Syria must first tackle the deeply rooted causes of the problem — for example, terrorism fuelled from abroad. The humanitarian disaster emerged in several parts of Syria only after terrorist groups entered the country. Before that, individuals enjoyed a safe, secure and dignified life.

Humanitarian assistance requires full transparency, coordination and cooperation with the Syrian Government, rather than unnecessary criticism. I wish to remind members that the Syrian Government has deployed all its efforts and resources to provide assistance to all those suffering, without discrminiation. The Syrian Government has cooperated with the United Nations, and we have done so in fact, not just words. We need help in bearing this burden. The Syrian Government and the United Nations thus far have implemented six humanitarian assistance plans, by which assistance has been provided to millions of Syrians. It must be recalled that the Syrian Government continues to bear the major burden of this emergency assistance because of the insufficient financing for the humanitarian assistance plans.

Some attempt to say that access of humanitarian assistance to troubled areas can be achieved by accepting all demands of the United Nations and that aid would then be delivered, and that the Syrian Government should simply agree as if were nothing more than an administrative procedure. This is a simplistic way of seeing things and is not in keeping with the facts on the ground. There are a number of considerations that cannot be ignored. We are referring to providing assistance to dangerous areas, where armed terrorist organizations are active, including terrorist organizations that have been listed by the Security Council, and in areas neighbouring those areas. These terrorist groups carry out terrorist acts, and military actions are being undertaken to combat them. All precautions need to be taken to ensure the safety and the security of those active in the humanitarian field and that the routes they use are safe.

Furthermore, humanitarian assistance must be delivered to individuals, and should not fall into the hands of terrorists, as has happened in the past. For example, terrorists seized humanitarian assistance sent to the inhabitants of Madaya; they looted their houses, seized the aid and then exploited the inhabitants by selling the food they had looted at exhorbitant prices, creating a source of financing of terrorism. That was what the whole world heard yesterday from the inhabitants of Madaya in their testimony given to representatives of international organizations.

The Syrian Government is the Government that is most mindful of its people. No one can claim to care more about our people than we do, no other country, particularly when it comes to providing assistance to dangerous areas under the control of armed terrorist groups. The Syrian Government is making real, concrete efforts in this context. These are not just empty words. I recall by way of example, and the list is not exhaustive, a single case regarding the city of Madaya, this city that some have used to try to manipulate international public opinion. The reality is that a great many people are not aware that the Government of Syria, in cooperation with the United Nations and international organizations, enabled the provision of three shipments of humanitarian aid to Madaya, starting on 18 October 2015. The last shipment arrived yesterday, 14 January 2016.

The Syrian Government addressed a note to the Resident Coordinator dated 27 December 2015 to ensure that humanitarian aid would be delivered to Madaya, to which we have not had a reponse. I quote here the note of the Minister for Foreign Affairs for Syrians Abroad:

> "It is our honour to request your august office to do everything possible as rapidly as possible to ensure, in parallel with the evacuation of those injured in these areas, that medical, food and fuel supplies are deliverd on 29 December 2015 as a priority, and that food assistance be delivered three days later in cities such as Madaya, Kafraya and Fu'ah, where living conditions are very difficult".

The Syrian Government still has not received a response to its request. The assistance provided during the last shipment consisted of 89 truckloads.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic would like once again to reiterate its commitment to cooperate with the Organization and the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide humanitarian assistance to affected civilians in all parts of Syria, without discrimination, including areas identified by the United Nations as hard-to-reach or under siege.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.